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Students shaping internationalisation in a conflict-ridden society: Experiences of Israeli teacher education colleges

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**Students shaping internationalisation in a conflict-ridden society: Experiences of Israeli
teacher education colleges**

**FOR CONSIDERATION FOR SPECIAL ISSUE: ENGAGING STUDENTS IN
INTERNATIONALISATION** Revision 3

For Peer Review

Abstract

This article focuses on students from two Israeli teacher education colleges serving marginalised communities, both of which participated in a European Union (EU) project aimed at fostering internationalisation in higher education institutions in Israel. The study reported focuses on students' agency in shaping institutional internationalisation processes, in particular during their studies but also, as it became apparent, later in their teaching careers following graduation. Moreover, we explore how students' agency in internationalisation is shaped by the conflict and its consequences. Employing a qualitative methodology, we followed six students' personal and professional trajectories, revealing the nature and scope of their activities and perceptions in light of their proactive role in internationalisation in their institutions. We show how life in a conflict-ridden society may prompt proactivity and agency amongst marginalised students, revealing and discussing the potential transformative nature of students' agency in internationalisation processes. Our findings indicate that institutions can strive to facilitate student agency and utilise it to further develop internationalisation within their institutions.

Introduction

In most countries, both in the school system and within higher education, internationalisation has become increasingly important and continues to move from the margins to the core of the educational realm (Chankseliani, 2018), although international dimensions have always been present in higher education (de Wit, Hunter, Egron-Polak, & Howard, 2015). Directors of educational institutions and policy-makers constantly struggle to internationalise education due to economic, political, academic, and socio-cultural rationales (De Wit, 2002: 83-102; Hudzik, 2011), and governments invest substantial resources to engage in this process, despite various critiques of such investments (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011).

In conflict-ridden societies, internationalisation processes are in greater danger of being exploited for dubious purposes than they are in peaceful contexts (Authors, 2017). This problematic situation stems from the fact that conflict shapes the power relations between the involved parties, while relations with different stakeholders are framed in light of the status quo. For example, in a conflict-ridden society such as Israel, student participation in international student exchanges may be affected by Palestinian support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign; and students from Palestine might face difficulties entering Israel and other countries due to security issues (Authors, 2017). Moreover, the physical mobility that prototypes internationalisation is usually constrained in conflict-ridden societies, immediately affecting other aspects of the process as well.

Some scholars claim that assessing internationalisation's outcomes at the individual (student) level is a promising direction to develop and sustain internationalisation, particularly in conflict-ridden societies (Larsen, 2016; Maxwell, 2018). This direction will ensure an emphasis on the rationales directly related to students' learning outcomes, enabling a more proactive and meaningful role for their engagement. Students, when they are involved in decision-making, may also assist institutions in envisioning and enacting internationalisation strategies. Moreover, fostering intercultural competence, cosmopolitanism, or global citizenship may provide a pathway to actual conflict resolution and reconciliation through capabilities and consciousness developed by the students (Dill, 2013). Such developments may be led by higher education institutions and facilitated through internationalisation processes (Aktas, Pitts, Richards, & Silova, 2017).

Traditionally, students have been perceived as taking a passive role in internationalisation processes. This study aims to highlight students' agency in these processes in particular

during their studies but also in their teaching careers upon graduation. Moreover, we reveal the role of the conflict in Israel on students' agency, thus asserting that students' agency, although transformative in the internationalisation processes within and beyond the colleges' boundaries, is shaped, significantly, by the conflict and its consequences.

Background

Students' role in internationalisation

Internationalisation is a process shaped by several institutional and national rationales, usually driven by the publicly declared need to 'create' globally competent citizens (Dewey & Duff, 2009), as well as by economic, social, academic, and political motivations at institutional and national levels (Knight, 2004). Indeed, institutions and governments worldwide invest increasing energy and resources to internationalise in every sphere of their education systems (Fischer & Green, 2018). Certainly, internationalisation, which emerged as an institutional venture over thirty years ago, has become a consensual value that is pursued energetically on the basis of diverse and sometimes conflicting agendas. As such, internationalisation is commonly described in financial and sometimes cynical terms (Knight, 2015). Such cynicism has been highlighted in various studies of stakeholders' perceptions of the process (see for example Green and Mertova, 2016 for analysis of academics' views and Guo and Guo, 2017 for students' perceptions).

Several authors suggest that overcoming the negative consequences of internationalisation might be pursued through reinforcement of the link between the process at the organisational level and its outcomes at students' level (Fischer & Green, 2018; Leask, 2009). Such outcomes, sometimes aggregated under the term of 'global citizenship' (Larsen, 2016) might allow progress in internal and external challenges if promoted by the institution.

Nevertheless, myriad issues and concerns present challenges to internationalisation in many contexts. Such challenges include 'ethnic and religious tensions' (Wihlborg & Robson, 2017, p.7), tensions that are especially prevalent in divided societies. Yet, if we consider the potential of higher education to illuminate and critique values, cultures and academic traditions (Stromquist, 2013), then, in a conflicted context such as Israel, it is even more crucial that students and academics are exposed to and engage with those principles of internationalisation that foreground social justice and higher education's role in the public good.

As this need for a more transformative internationalisation continues (Authors, 2016) we need to attend to those such as Hawawini (2016) who disrupts more ‘conventional’ conceptualisations of internationalisation with his plea for higher education to learn from the world rather than to integrate international dimensions into the institution. By engaging students in internationalisation processes that include, but are not limited to, mobility, their ability to learn from the world and from views of the world that may differ from those that dominate in their context is enhanced. Exposing the students to curricula that foreground intercultural learning and that ‘prioritise the development of a knowledge of self, through a retelling of one’s culture and history...in order to decide how to relate to other cultures and societies, is the basic tenet of global citizenship’ (Clifford & Montgomery, 2017, 1148) might be the key. Similarly, Connell (2017) claims that curricula need to address the marginalisation or discrediting of cultural, religious and linguistic traditions through ‘curricular justice’, encouraging dialogue and reframing learning as conversation.

For many people in Israel, higher education is the first opportunity that they have to encounter the ‘other’ since schools are usually separate, assigned and chosen by religious affiliation and place of living. The words of those who participated in our research both exemplify the admirable aim of learning from the world and also illustrate the inherent difficulties that arise in engaging with dimensions of internationalisation and, indeed, shaping it, in such a complex society.

Israeli society and the stratified Israeli education system

Israel, a state of eight million citizens, consists of a Jewish majority (roughly 79% of the population), with Palestinian Arabs comprising a national minority of 21% (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The conflict between the Jewish majority and the predominantly Muslim Palestinian minority is longstanding and severe. Although officially offered full rights, Palestinian citizens of Israel have suffered chronically from discriminatory resource distribution and lesser representation within the hegemonic social structures such as national politics and governmental agencies (Bekerman, 2007). As a national minority, Palestinian Arabs in Israel have multiple identities; on the one hand, they possess Israeli citizenship, and on the other hand many feel a sense of belonging to Palestinian-Arab society and identify themselves with the national aspiration of the Palestinian people. The Bedouin Arabs (later Bedouins) in Israel are one of the Arab Muslim ethnic groups in Israeli society (5.5% of the population) characterised by a tribal culture that in the past had a semi-nomadic lifestyle. In recent decades, Bedouins have been undergoing urbanisation processes and cultural

transformations including the change in the status of women, and participation in formal education systems.

Schools in Israel are divided into several sub-systems (i.e., the general (Hebrew) education system, the Jewish religious public education system, and the Arab public education system) (Abu Rabia Quader & Oplatka, 2008). . However, the higher education system is common to members of all of the religious groups; Jewish, Muslim, and Christian students attend Israeli universities and colleges (Arar & Mustafa, 2011). Yet despite the unified higher education system, teachers' education for the Arab sector in particular is partially segregated. Teacher trainees for the primary and lower secondary school level study at one of the three Arab teacher-training colleges, at Jewish teacher-training colleges, or on specific tracks targeted at the Arab population within Jewish colleges. We focus on two of these colleges in our study.

Research aims

The present study is based on a qualitative interpretive phenomenographic approach (Creswell & Poth, 2017) focused on understanding people's perceptions and life experiences. Specifically, the research aims to understand the experiences of teachers and future teachers regarding the following research questions:

1. How do students in these unique contexts perceive the meanings, means, and challenges of internationalisation?
2. How do students involve themselves proactively in internationalisation processes?
3. How does the Israeli-Arab conflict shape and affect students' perceptions of internationalisation?

Research setting

This study focuses on students at two teacher education colleges serving marginalised populations; a Palestinian Arab college in the centre of Israel and a mixed college in Israel's southern periphery (with a student population of approximately 50% Bedouin minorities). Both colleges, along with five others, participated in an EU-funded TEMPUS project aimed at developing internationalisation processes on campus. TEMPUS was a European Union funded programme which supported the modernisation of higher education in the EU's neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East through bottom up developed projects in these neighbouring countries

with the support of EU higher education institutions (Authors, 2015). Today similar projects are executed under the Erasmus plus framework (Authors 2017).

Prior to the TEMPUS project, students in the partner colleges were not at all familiar with internationalisation. During the four years of the project, staff and students were introduced to the different dimensions of internationalisation, introducing internationalised curricula into study programmes, participating in exchange programmes with international higher education institutions, and developing offices for International Affairs—thus expanding their international horizons. As authors of this article, we were involved in the project in various ways including teaching, research, mentoring and curricula development.

Methodology

Participants

The students that were interviewed were identified by the college staff and authors as being proactive, agentic, and unique in their activities on campus (two of the authors teach at the colleges; hence, had first-hand acquaintance with students there). To follow the call of the Special Issue, we deliberately aimed our inquiry to explore students’ agency in the specific educational context. The respondents from the Palestinian Arab college were involved in the activities of the International Office; they had participated in exchange programmes with institutions abroad and hosted delegations from international organisations. The respondents from the mixed college studied on (and graduated) from its M.Ed. programme, which, through the TEMPUS project, implemented an internationalised curriculum.

The first, second, and third authors conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the selected students from October 2017 to December 2017. Six students (five females and one male¹) were interviewed through Skype and in person. Participants are introduced in Table 1.

Table 1: Study Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	General Description
Esti (Student at the mixed	Female	A Jewish special education teacher and an instructor at the Ministry of Education. Esti specialises in implementing technology to assist disabled children. She currently works with blind and visually

¹ This ratio broadly reflects the actual gender distribution at teacher-training institutions.

college)		impaired children. She participated in the study trip to a European University organised by the college for internationalisation purposes.
Shirley (Student at the mixed college)	Female	Shirley is a Jewish teacher. She is very active in the social life of her community. She works as a special education teacher with visually impaired children. She participated in the study trip to a European University organised by the college for internationalisation purposes.
Fatima (Student at the mixed college)	Female	Fatima is a Bedouin special education teacher and the director of the Centre for Special Education. She was actively involved in the activities aimed at internationalisation and initiated social events during her study. She also implemented the ideas of internationalisation in her working group at the Centre.
Sofi (Student at the mixed college)	Female	Sofi is a Jewish elementary school teacher and the deputy principal of a school in the south of Israel. She initiated an international project in which her students interact with students in North America. She participated in the college's study trip to a European University.
Jamilla (Student at the Palestinian Arab college)	Female	Jamilla is a Palestinian Arab Muslim pre-service teacher, a third-year student of early childhood education. She is an active participant in internationalisation activities at the college, having participated in an exchange group in Austria. She recently received a prestigious scholarship from the U.S. Embassy to study for one semester at an American university.
Mahmud (Student at the Palestinian Arab college)	Male	Mahmud is a Palestinian Arab Muslim pre-service teacher enrolled in his fourth year of Arabic and Islamic studies who was actively involved in internationalisation activities with Muslim participants from a Muslim country.

In the recruitment phase, each interviewee was contacted by email and asked to participate. All those approached agreed, and the interviews were scheduled by Skype or in person. The interviews lasted between 60 to 120 minutes. Some participants were interviewed twice to refine points that arose during the interviews or afterwards. Interview questions focused on participants’ descriptions and perceptions of internationalisation, their experiences in international education, and the extent to which they perceive internationalisation as important to students and to their campus. Participants were asked to reflect on their own experiences as students and the relevance of internationalisation in their lives following graduation. With the interviewees’ informed consent all interviews were audiotaped using a digital voice recorder and transcribed. Esti, Shirley and Fatima were interviewed in Hebrew, Sofi and Jamilla in English, and Mahmud in Arabic. All transcripts were translated to English for analysis. Data analysis took place following each interview, and additions and additional questions were added between interview rounds based on the responses. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committees of both institutions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the four stages that Marshall and Rossman (2014) suggested.² This analysis identifies themes in the data by searching for recurrent experiences, feelings, and attitudes, so as to codify, reduce, and connect different categories into central themes. The coding was guided by the principles of comparative analysis, including the comparison of any coded element in terms of emergent categories and sub-categories leading to the identification of patterns. In analysing the interviews, we looked specifically for convergence and differences across participants’ reports (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The emerging issues were then assembled as several major themes regarding the participants’ motivation and views. Verbatim quotes are used throughout the findings section in order to provide a more accurate account and representation of students’ own perceptions and voice. The quotes were translated to English (when necessary) and back to Hebrew/Arabic to ensure that the intended and accurate meaning was maintained in the translation process. Thus, we aim to maintain the students’ authentic voices throughout the article to the best of our ability, mindful of the potential danger of speaking for others or asserting our own opinions and perceptions over those expressed directly by the students. The constitution of the research team aided access and the critical engagement with the data, we would suggest. The authors are a Palestinian-

²Namely, “organising the data,” “generating categories, themes, and patterns,” “testing any emergent hypotheses,” and “searching for alternative explanations.”

Arab scholar and a Jewish scholar, working at the colleges, a Jewish scholar working at a research intensive institution in Israel, thus possessing knowledge about the higher education system in Israel, but being an outsider for the research setting and an EU scholar, who had a leading role in the EU project. The last two authors thus served as critical outsiders throughout the data analysis process, suggesting alternative explanations to the data and facilitating a process of sharpening the final interpretations presented here. The trustworthiness of findings derived from multiple iterations between the authors, repeated readings of theory and interview transcripts, and continuous dialogue between the authors, the data and the literature. As suggested by Bourke (2014), during the stages of data collection and analysis we constantly addressed our own positionalities in the field, reflexively engaging with the data and each other, acting in a constant “self-scrutiny, and self-conscious awareness of the relationship between the researcher and an ‘other’” (p. 2). Our relationship with each other, developed through our engagement in the TEMPUS project, is robust. We are each positioned differently in the context with one of us being a total outsider. We argue that the robustness of our relationship supported us to challenge each other when necessary, in particular when one or other of us considered that another might be engaging in stereotypical interpretations of data.

The main limitations are a small sample and the process of selection of the participants. The participants from both colleges were identified as proactive in internationalisation by the authors who teach in these colleges and were open to being interviewed regarding issues related to internationalisation and identity. Students are frequently pictured as passive recipients of internationalisation (Waters and Brooks, 2010) but, in this case, despite its small size, the group is presenting an agentic outlier to the common discourse in the literature. In our purposeful sample, the students perceive their role as not limited to their role as learners, but rather permeating their professional life. We hope that future research in the area will benefit from our findings, in particular in studies of students’ agencies in other non-western societies as well as in research into the effects of students’ agency on the implementation and policymaking of this process at organisational and national levels.

Findings

Professional, social, and political dimensions emerged from the interviews as playing a major role both in students’ agency in the process of internationalisation and, more broadly, in the application of internationalisation within a conflict-ridden society. We describe below each of

the dimensions, providing a glimpse into complex, multidimensional perceptions of internationalisation processes through the eyes of the students and graduates.

Professional dimensions: Implementing internationalisation and multicultural activities in their studies and professional lives

All respondents rationalised their proactivity in internationalisation processes mainly through a professional lens, stressing the importance of being involved in the global community, being updated regarding educational systems in other countries, sharing professional knowledge, and life-long learning in order to secure their professional prosperity. Since all of them were teachers or training to be teachers, the students envisioned internationalisation as an essential dimension of their learning, which could and should be intrinsic to their classrooms. Esti stated that “the more communication takes place, the more we use technology, the more we will succeed in crossing national borders; knowledge developed in one place will move to another. We need to spread and receive knowledge, not to remain in a bubble.”

This quote addresses internationalisation from a pragmatic perspective, stressing the capabilities needed and the means to achieve these, by participation in internationalisation processes. Such words resonate with the ‘capabilities approach’ of global citizenship (Dill, 2013), which may be fostered through internationalisation. Interviewees claimed that student and staff exchanges, as well as online and face-to-face conversations with international colleagues can promote internationalisation in higher education and also transform the political situation in Israel. In Jamilla’s words, “exchanges, conversing, and talking to others [lead to] accepting diversity.” Here, Jamilla focuses on the possible contribution of internationalisation beyond practical means, as a way to “accept diversity”, implying that pragmatic and ideological motivations to internationalisation may intervene.

Foreign language skills were mentioned specifically as a necessary condition for communication and desired skills that students aimed to acquire through their proactiveness. “We live in a global world. It is important to know more about education in other countries, to learn more strategies and more skills, for example, languages,” Fatima explained. She noted, “I’m very successful in my career but because I’m not good at English, I feel I miss a lot. [Mastery of a] language allows us to understand a culture and read articles.” Lack of fluency in English had hindered Jamilla’s earlier experiences with internationalisation . She told us that her first application to the student exchange programme was rejected, with a

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3 recommendation to improve her spoken English and essay-writing skills. After additional
4 language training, she was accepted on the programme. Later, her ability to converse in
5 English qualified her for a management position in the college's Social Involvement Unit and
6 a scholarship through a prestigious programme sponsored by the U.S. Embassy to study for
7 one semester in the US. She stated:
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11 My participation in the exchange programme prepared me for the scholarship.
12 Professionally, it opened many doors for me. Currently, I even consider the possibility
13 of teaching in another country. I urge all students and friends to participate in
14 international activities at the college and to actively travel and learn in order to
15 become a better teacher.
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22 In this example, Jamilla demonstrates the personal advantages of internationalisation
23 and the possible advantages of internationalisation for her own students as a reason for
24 agentic investment in internationalisation.
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27 It is important to highlight here the double disadvantage that Palestinian-Arab
28 students face in their professional lives. With Arabic as their mother tongue, living in a
29 country with Hebrew as a dominant language, these students are encountering even more
30 challenging situations when engaging with other countries, usually using English (their third
31 language). We can see that pursuing professional success is more challenging for these
32 Palestinian Arab students than for their Jewish peers, echoing the exclusive nature of
33 internationalisation (Guo & Guo, 2017). All respondents related to their responsibility as
34 teachers to educate their pupils to live in a global world, which extends their own experiences
35 in internationalisation as higher education students. They mentioned various skills their
36 pupils needed: willingness to learn and change, language skills, open-mindedness,
37 communication, socialisation, technological literacy, openness to cultural differences, respect
38 for others, and appreciation of universal humanistic values. In Esti's words,
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47 It is essential to develop language skills—reading, and writing—since children will
48 need to communicate with people from other countries. Children have to know how to
49 use technology such as special keyboards, mobile equipment, software ... They need
50 socialisation skills to integrate into work teams ... We have to keep universal values,
51 no matter which religion we belong to.
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The interviewees shared their proactive experiences relating to the internationalisation process; these included communication with delegations from abroad, study trips to other countries, and implementing internationalisation in their teaching and professional practices. Sofi, Esti and Shirley participated voluntarily in visits to universities in European countries organised by their college, aimed at familiarising students with those countries' educational systems. Jamilla also participated in the exchange programme with a European university. They saw their visits as a meaningful turning point in the perception of internationalisation. Shirley commented: "visiting a European University (name of the country omitted to maintain anonymity) contributed to me a lot. Even in occasional conversations, I tell about their educational system, especially about teacher education. It made me think about my work and what I'd like to adopt from there and what not."

Jamilla became more active in workshops sponsored by the International Relations Office (IRO) at her college, in which she presented newly learned techniques, methods, and class structures. She noted: "We have exchange students visiting our college, and we meet foreign groups from embassies and other institutions. We, the students, arrange and manage orientations of incoming groups, and show them around. Through internationalisation, we can promote multiculturalism." During her study trip, she encountered some international students at the European university she visited. Some were Arabs but were afraid or ashamed to speak their language; she helped them use the language through songs and music. Jamilla reflected on her experiences:

Being exposed to internationalisation and multiculturalism allowed us to focus on issues other than disciplinary teaching. We learned the value of collaboration, the importance of teaching skills of coping with difficulties, and how to teach our pupils how to make connections. [These are] things we don't teach in our schools.

Shirley likewise integrated intercultural dimensions into her own teaching, in leading a project whereby her school children participate in an inter-school activity communicating online with children from different schools in Israel. Also Sofi, after graduation, initiated an international project whereby her pupils communicate and work collaboratively on robotics with children in North America . Throughout the interview, Sofi stressed how much her teaching approach had become more collaborative and inclusive, following her exposure to principles of internationalisation and of internationalisation of the curriculum during her MEd.

Social dimensions

The social dimensions that emerged from the interviews concerned issues of gender, equality, social constraints, and the role of religion in students' roles in the internationalisation processes. Palestinian Arab society in Israel is mostly traditional and patriarchal; it is often described as a society in transition (Abbas & Mesch, 2015). As such, it is neither fully traditional nor fully liberal. The family still plays a major role in setting guidelines for women's behaviour, dictating what is allowed and what is forbidden, especially when women participate in activities from which they were traditionally excluded (Abu Rabia Quader & Oplatka, 2008). Such attitudes towards women may present specific challenges to students' involvement in internationalisation. Indeed, Jamilla had the consent of her mother but not her father to attend the Masters' programme, and she tried very hard to convince her father "that also women can do it."

Family resistance to female students' study trips abroad, in particular, was an obstacle that Palestinian Arab interviewees had to overcome. Bedouin women are more confined in their mobility, although according to our data some progress has been made in this regard; as Jamilla put it, "women are not free to move around at night without their husband or brother. Travelling abroad alone was a taboo and impossible, although some trends of freedom are starting to emerge recently and women can travel to study or stay away overnight to study." Notably, even the male Palestinian Arab Muslim interviewee, Mahmud, who himself participated in an educational visit abroad, expressed concerns about allowing women to travel alone, citing a saying of the Prophet and verses from the Qur'an. Moreover, according to him, one of the female lecturers at the Arab college also asked that her husband be included on an overseas trip on religious grounds. As researchers, we held different views on these responses and discussed them at some length. What was important to us, however, was that the participants' original voices and perspectives were foregrounded.

Another theme regarding social challenges concerned the lack of sensitivity to national identity and religious traditions of Jews and Palestinian Arabs. In Israel, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, it is customary for people to stand for a moment's silence to honour the victims when a siren is sounded nation-wide. At the mixed college, this day marks tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish students because Bedouins do not tend to participate, and prefer to leave the class during the siren call. Some Jews accept this practice and others consider it disrespectful. Esti stated:

I remember Holocaust Remembrance Day, when some Bedouin students exited a classroom when the siren was sounded. Then somebody [a Jewish teacher, whose relatives were Holocaust victims] reprimanded one of the students. She [the Bedouin student] was very hurt. All Jewish students supported her. But later we [the Jewish students] discussed this case, and some students said that Bedouins have to stand up and give respect to the Holocaust. I disagreed—they do not have to give respect. It's not theirs—they gave respect by exiting the classroom. They did not whistle, did not sneer. In their prayers, they do not require me to kneel. It was wrong to require from them to stand still. It was right to discuss [this incident], since it allowed us to learn how to act and respond in such situations.

Religious issues, moreover, were mentioned as substantially impacting attainment of the goals of internationalisation and thus were challenging to the students, somehow limiting their capability for agency. Esti related a story told by her son, reflecting that religious traditions of different cultures were not respected equally in one higher education institution because of the pressure of extremely religious Jewish students:

Last year on the holiday of Hannukah, near the *menorah* [the traditional candlesticks], the student association put a Christmas tree ... Then religious students asked to remove the tree, arguing that it does not belong to the Jewish tradition. My son was surprised and objected since he believes in respecting all cultures. Religious students were angry about that. I was proud of my boy for fighting for this. But ultimately the tree was removed. A religious majority won.

Esti shared another example of a lack of sensitivity among some Jewish students towards Muslim religious traditions: “During Ramadan, the local cafeteria decided to close the part where hot food was served. Some Jewish students [outside Esti's study group] were angry about that; they even complained on the college Facebook ... But it is a part of coexistence.”

The commonly cited definition of internationalisation (Knight, 2004) addresses global, international and intercultural dimensions of the process. Here, we show how students' agency reflected upon the intercultural dimension, expressing their wishes and worries within their agentic role in the process. We wrote earlier (Authors, 2015) how in conflicted societies, internationalisation is largely perceived as an engagement between the groups in conflict, groups who are not necessarily from different countries. In other words, in Israel, students often refer to the "Other" as a member of the conflicting groups Jewish/Palestinian-Arab.

Participating in and even leading internationalisation activities was described by students as a means to foster intercultural understanding with the internal “Other” (Authors, 2016).

The interviewees from the mixed college noted a cultural gap between Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Fatima, the Bedouin teacher, shared the following anecdote:

One of the activities [in the international module] was devoted to becoming familiar with the cultures in our group. For example, Mina [pseudonym], a Jewish student, shared that when her daughter saw the Bedouin teacher (a member of the group) in traditional dress in a picture on the computer screen she panicked. [The traditional Arabic dress] was threatening in her imagination. We laughed, but then we recognised that it’s not funny. It is also possible that if a Bedouin child sees a religious Jew, then perhaps s/he too would be frightened. And those are people who live next to each other, a few metres away. This shed light for us on how important is it to talk to each other and to know each other. If we don’t, we all lose.

In her opinion, intercultural activities aimed at promoting relationships between different groups within Israeli society on a personal and systemic level should be implemented in schools and be an integral part of internationalisation processes; moreover Fatima’s agency did not end with graduation but continued into her professional role as a school teacher. Issues of social importance such as gender, cultural sensitivity and intercultural interactions were discussed by our participants as direct occurrences of and in internationalisation.

Political dimensions and the Arab-Israeli conflict

The last dimension that emerged from the interviews was the complex political situation in Israel; namely, political tension stemming from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its role in the agency expressed by the students in the internationalisation processes. On the most basic level, interviewees noted discrimination in state budgets and inadequate resources in Palestinian Arab Israeli communities as impeding internationalisation prospects for students from this sector. Students addressed this profound inequality in a much wider sense, not necessarily restricting it to their role in higher education. Fatima stressed that Bedouin secondary schools have very limited resources and children have less opportunity to learn and be prepared for advanced studies, which can diminish their chances of being involved in internationalisation.

Beyond discrimination in funding, however, Palestinian-Arab interviewees considered the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to be a major challenge to internationalisation in Israeli higher

education. While respondents from the mixed college viewed political aspects of internationalisation as connected to the conflict and complicating the issues of co-existence, students at the Palestinian Arab college perceived internationalisation as an opportunity to be ambassadors for their community and Islam, especially in the face of rising Islamophobia in the West. Jamilla noted: "the Arab-Jewish conflict makes things extreme; during the visits abroad, the word 'conflict' was mentioned a lot. Our job is to present our culture and religion and explain ourselves to others. The conflict was positive in the sense that it allowed us to explain it and engage with others." As Mahmud put it,

we need to explain ourselves to others; ... thus, internationalisation at our college is satisfactory in my view and it ought to continue ... Furthermore, internationalisation at Arab college carries a specific importance, and it is different than in other colleges in Israel due to religious, political, and cultural restraints and limitations.

Both Bedouin and Jewish respondents from the mixed college perceived the conflict as challenging the intercultural relations between people in Israel.

Our interviews revealed that the period of escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the war between Israel and Hamas in 2014 was equally traumatic for Jewish and Bedouin interviewees at the mixed college, as they live in the region that was under rocket attacks. Fatima recalled:

We all—Bedouins and Jews—live in the same region that was under rocket attacks by Hamas. We were all equally fearful and we constantly shared our feelings... During the rocket attacks from Gaza, my daughter panicked. Every time we heard a boom, she hid under a desk. Last year we went to Antalya to rest, and at the hotel, music that sounded like the bomb-warning siren was playing at the pool. She ran out of the pool, terrified. Other children felt no fear. So, nobody wants a war.

The war challenged the relationships in the mixed college's study group, but through open communication, the students managed to maintain their relationships by condemning any kind of violence and expressing empathy to each other. Fatima emphasised the importance of good personal relations for improving understanding and diminishing mutual fears, even during critical events such as a war:

Even during the Arab-Israeli conflict's escalation, we [the study group at the mixed college] were empathetic each to other. We all condemned the killing of innocent people. During the summer semester of 2014, classes on campus were cancelled and

we had to study online due to the war. We all supported each other. We are all responsible adults. We conversed frequently using WhatsApp and supported each other academically and emotionally. We felt belongingness and cohesion within the group.

All respondents expressed their desire to live in peace with mutual respect between people belonging to different nationalities and cultures. Shirley suggested that to accomplish such coexistence, “we have to know other’s cultures.” Esti blamed religious extremism as the main cause of wars and conflicts:

I think you can hate a person but not a nation or community. Most wars and conflicts in the world happen because of religious extremism. They think, ‘If you believe in something different than what I believe, I’ll hate you.’ We have to keep universal values no matter which religion we belong to.

Here again, students adopt the notion of ‘global citizenship’ (Green & Mertova, 2016) as a desired outcome of internationalisation. Pursuing universal values thus help to shape inter group relations in Israel. In Fatima’s opinion, Palestinians and Jews should recognise each other and return to the peace process:

Today we, Palestinians and Jews alike, know that there are two nations here, and no one will leave here. This is the best place to live—we’ll go neither to Syria nor to Jordan ... I think it is important to recognise the other side in her/his right to be here in peace. I think we have already started the peace process and it’s a pity that it’s frozen. People understand that the life is short, everyone wants to live. It’s not worth fighting. Better to live in peace, to be secure. It’s important to sit around a table: one gives up on something, the other gives up on something and peace will come. If both sides recognise each other, they will both win.

Discussion and conclusion

In our interviews, three major dimensions that shaped how students expressed agency in internationalisation processes emerged: professional, social, and political. These dimensions were detailed in the findings section, revealing the specific domains where internationalisation was engaged with, and also students’ agency that was transferred from their colleges to their professional worlds.

This Special Issue is aimed at drawing on new ways of thinking about students’ engagement, which positions the students as agentic contributors to university life. By

focusing on marginalised populations situated in conflict ridden societies we reveal some of the dimensions that play a critical role in the students' agency and their unique considerations, rationales and actions. In addition, we were surprised by the extent that students' agency was not limited to their activities in their institutions, but rather followed them in their professional lives. It might be that the teaching profession provides them with unique opportunities to exploit their knowledge and skills by preparing the future generation of students. This notion should be further explored by administrators of teacher education programmes as a potential field of action.

Theoretically, internationalisation is assumed to lead to an understanding of the 'other' alongside developing a sense of empathy on the one hand and agency to change the existing situation on the other (Authors, 2017; Green & Mertova, 2016). Thus, promoting integration of the international, global, and intercultural dimensions into the aims, activities, and delivery of education to promote intercultural competence/cosmopolitanism or global citizenship, might contribute to conflict resolution, given the skills and attitudes that students acquire through the process. We claim that global citizenship, although the term was not used directly by the students, is indeed a suitable analytical construct, for the understanding of these students' agency. In our case, students expressed non-compliance with the social and political constraints of their lives, and thus were urged to act. Our participants, who were not familiar with internationalisation prior to the TEMPUS project, became proactive in promoting internationalisation in order to achieve professional advantage (as per pragmatic meanings of global citizenship) and they seek peace and mutual understanding (as per the ideological meaning of this construct) (Authors, 2017a; Leask, 2008).

Our conclusions thus anchor students' agency in the institutional and national contexts. We claim that proactiveness is being exercised when some pragmatic value is being offered to the students and this value is clear and tangible (students mention English language, computer skills, working with the 'other' etc). Moreover, students in our study showed some incompliance with many of the dominant social norms in their institutions and home environments, but this incompliance was possible, due to the 'high gain' that students had from expressing their agency. In addition, students' agency was not universal and neutral, but rather context specific, anchored to the intercultural relations between the minority and majority in Israel and to the conflict at large. Thus, to promote students' agency, institutions must not only provide opportunities and training (where appropriate), but more importantly deliberately show the students the value that can be gained from such engagements.

In terms of practical recommendations, we suggest that when developing and implementing internationalisation strategies, institutional stakeholders must pay particular attention to students' potential agency and thus develop various support mechanisms to promote such agency. Moreover, specific attention should be paid to the various differences in the local student population, in particular where these differences lead to tension, as in Israeli higher education.

For Peer Review

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For Peer Review

**Students shaping internationalisation in a conflict-ridden society: Experiences of Israeli
teacher education colleges**

**FOR CONSIDERATION FOR SPECIAL ISSUE: ENGAGING STUDENTS IN
INTERNATIONALISATION** Revision 3

For Peer Review

Abstract

This article focuses on students ~~and graduates~~ from two Israeli teacher education colleges serving marginalised communities, both of which participated in a European Union (EU) project aimed at fostering internationalisation in higher education institutions in Israel. The study reported focuses on students’ agency in shaping institutional internationalisation processes, in particular during their studies but also as it became apparent, later in their teaching careers ~~in schools~~ following graduation. Moreover, we explore how students’ agency in internationalisation is shaped by the conflict and its consequences. Employing a qualitative methodology, we followed six students’ ~~and graduates’~~ personal and professional trajectories, revealing the nature and scope of their activities and perceptions in light of their proactive role in internationalisation ~~related activities~~ in their institutions. We show how life in a conflict-ridden society may prompt proactivity and agency amongst marginalised students, revealing and discussing the potential transformative nature of students’ agency in internationalisation processes. Our findings indicate that institutions can strive to facilitate student agency and utilise it to further develop internationalisation within their institutions.

Introduction

In most countries, both in the school system and within higher education, internationalisation has become increasingly important and continues to move from the margins to the core of the educational realm (Chankseliani, 2018), although international ~~aspects-dimensions of higher education~~ have always been present in higher education (de Wit, Hunter, Egron-Polak, & Howard, 2015). Directors of educational institutions and policy-makers constantly struggle to internationalise education due to economic, political, academic, and socio-cultural rationales (De Wit, 2002: 83-102; Hudzik, 2011), and governments invest substantial resources to engage in this process, despite various critiques of such investments (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011).

In conflict-ridden societies, internationalisation processes are in greater danger of being exploited for dubious purposes ~~more~~ than they are in peaceful contexts (Authors, 2017). This problematic situation stems from the fact that conflict ~~is actually shaping~~ shapes the power relations between the involved parties, while relations with different stakeholders are framed in light of the status quo. For example, in a conflict-ridden society such as Israel, student participation in international student exchanges may be affected by Palestinian support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign; and students from Palestine might face difficulties entering Israel and other countries due to security issues (Authors, 2017). Moreover, the physical mobility that prototypes internationalisation is usually constrained in conflict-ridden societies, immediately affecting other aspects of the process as well.

Some scholars claim that assessing internationalisation's outcomes at the individual (student) level is a promising direction to develop and sustain internationalisation, particularly in conflict-ridden societies (Larsen, 2016; Maxwell, 2018). This direction will ensure an emphasis on the rationales directly related to students' learning outcomes, enabling a more proactive and meaningful role for their engagement. Students, when they are involved ~~in— decision-making—~~, may also assist institutions in envisioning and enacting internationalisation strategies. Moreover, fostering intercultural competence, cosmopolitanism, or global citizenship may provide a pathway to actual conflict resolution and reconciliation through capabilities and consciousness developed by the students (Dill, 2013). Such developments may be led by higher education institutions and facilitated through internationalisation processes (Aktas, Pitts, Richards, & Silova, 2017).

Traditionally, students have been perceived as taking a passive role in internationalisation processes. This study aims to highlight students' agency in ~~shaping the institutional internationalisation process~~these is process-es in particular during their studies but also in their ~~own~~ teaching careers upon graduation. Moreover, we reveal the role of the conflict in Israel on students' agency, thus asserting that students' agency, although transformative in the internationalisation processes within and beyond the colleges' boundaries, is shaped, significantly, by the conflict and its consequences.

Background

Students' role in internationalisation

Internationalisation is a process shaped by several institutional and national rationales, usually driven by the publicly declared need to 'create' globally competent citizens (Dewey & Duff, 2009), as well as by economic, social, academic, and political motivations at institutional and national levels (Knight, 2004). Indeed, institutions and governments worldwide invest increasing energy and resources to internationalise in every sphere of their education systems (Fischer & Green, 2018). Certainly, internationalisation, which emerged as an institutional venture over thirty years ago, has become a consensual value that is pursued energetically on the basis of diverse and sometimes conflicting agendas. As such, internationalisation is commonly described in financial and sometimes cynical terms (Knight, 2015). Such cynicism has been highlighted in various studies of stakeholders' perceptions of the process (see for example Green and Mertova, 2016 for analysis of academics' views and Guo and Guo, 2017 for students' perceptions).

Several authors suggested that overcoming the negative consequences of internationalisation might be pursued through reinforcement of the link between the process at the organisational level and its outcomes at students' level (Fischer & Green, 2018; Leask, 2009). Such outcomes, sometimes aggregated under the term of 'global citizenship' (Larsen, 2016) might allow progress in internal and external challenges if promoted by the institution.

Nevertheless, myriad issues and concerns present challenges to internationalisation in many contexts. Such challenges include 'ethnic and religious tensions' (Wihlborg & Robson, 2017, p.7), tensions that are especially prevalent in divided societies. Yet, if we consider the potential of higher education to illuminate and critique values, cultures and academic traditions (Stromquist, 2013), then, in a conflicted context such as Israel, it is even more crucial that students and academics are exposed to and engage with those principles of

internationalisation that foreground social justice and higher education's role in the public good.

As this need for a more transformative internationalisation continues (Authors, 2016) we need to attend to those such as Hawawini (2016) who disrupts more 'conventional' conceptualisations of internationalisation with his plea for higher education to learn from the world rather than to integrate international dimensions into the institution. By engaging students in internationalisation processes that include, but are not limited to, mobility, their ability to learn from the world and from views of the world that may differ from those that dominate in their context is enhanced. Exposing the students to curricula that foreground intercultural learning and that 'prioritise the development of a knowledge of self, through a retelling of one's culture and history...in order to decide how to relate to other cultures and societies, is the basic tenet of global citizenship' (Clifford & Montgomery, 2017, 1148) might be the key. Similarly, Connell (2017) claims that curricula need to address the marginalisation or discrediting of cultural, religious and linguistic traditions through 'curricular justice', encouraging dialogue and reframing learning as conversation.

For many people in Israel, higher education is the first opportunity that they have to encounter the 'other' since schools are usually separate, assigned and chosen by religious affiliation and place of living, ~~as articulated in the next section~~. The words of those who participated in our research both exemplify the admirable aim of learning from the world and also illustrate the inherent difficulties that arise in engaging with dimensions of internationalisation and, indeed, shaping it, in such a complex society.

Israeli society and the stratified Israeli education system

Israel, a state of eight million citizens, consists of a Jewish majority (roughly 79% of the population), with Palestinian Arabs comprising a national minority of 21% (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The conflict between the Jewish majority and the predominantly Muslim Palestinian minority is longstanding and severe. Although officially offered full rights, Palestinian citizens of Israel have suffered chronically from discriminatory resource distribution and lesser representation within the hegemonic social structures such as national politics and governmental agencies (Bekerman, 2007). As a national minority, Palestinian Arabs in Israel have multiple identities; on the one hand, they possess Israeli citizenship, and on the other hand many feel a sense of belonging to ~~Arab-Palestinian-Arab~~ society and identify themselves with the national aspiration of the Palestinian people. The Bedouin Arabs (later Bedouins) in Israel are one of the Arab Muslim ethnic groups in Israeli society (5.5% of

the population) characterised by a tribal culture that in the past had a semi-nomadic lifestyle. In recent decades, Bedouins have been undergoing urbanisation processes and ~~essential cultural changes~~cultural transformations including the change in the status of women, and participation in formal education systems.

Schools in Israel are divided into several sub-systems (i.e., the general (Hebrew) education system, the Jewish religious public education system, and the Arab public education system) (Abu Rabia Quader & Oplatka, 2008). ~~While each sector maintains its own schools with a certain level of autonomy, many of the Arab schools are more tightly regulated by the state. Notably, however, all parents have the right to select whichever school system they want to register their children to; hence, Palestinian Arab citizens can choose to study in the general (Hebrew) public education system, for example. In most cases, however, parents prefer to send their children to schools in their own communities, thus maintaining *de facto* isolation. Conversely~~However, the higher education system is common to members of all of the religious groups; Jewish, Muslim, and Christian students attend Israeli universities and colleges (Arar & Mustafa, 2011). Yet despite the unified higher education system, teachers' education for the Arab sector in particular is partially segregated. Teacher trainees for the primary and lower secondary school level study at one of the three Arab teacher-training colleges, at Jewish teacher-training colleges, or on specific tracks targeted at the Arab population within Jewish colleges. ~~Since no Arab-Israeli university exists, teacher trainees for Arab secondary schools usually enrol in the schools of education of Israeli universities (Authors, 2014).~~We focus on two of these colleges in our study.

Research aims

The present study is based on a qualitative interpretive phenomenographic approach (Creswell & Poth, 2017) focused on understanding people's perceptions and life experiences. Specifically, the research aims to understand the experiences of teachers and future teachers regarding the following research questions:

1. How do students in these unique contexts perceive the meanings, means, and challenges of internationalisation?
2. How do students involve themselves proactively in internationalisation processes?
3. How does the Israeli-Arab conflict shape and affect students' perceptions of internationalisation?

Research setting

This study focuses on students at two teacher education colleges serving marginalised populations; a Palestinian Arab college in the centre of Israel and a mixed college in Israel's southern periphery (with a student population of approximately 50% Bedouin minorities). Both colleges, along with five others, participated in an EU-funded TEMPUS project aimed at developing internationalisation processes on campus. TEMPUS was a European Union funded programme which supported the modernisation of higher education in the EU's neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East through bottom up developed projects in these neighbouring countries with the support of EU higher education institutions (Authors, 2015). Today similar projects are executed under the Erasmus plus framework (Authors 2017).

Prior to the TEMPUS project, students in the partner colleges were not at all familiar with internationalisation. During the four years of the project, staff and students were introduced to the different dimensions of internationalisation, introducing internationalised curricula into study programmes, participating in exchange programmes with international higher education institutions, and developing offices for International Affairs—thus expanding their international horizons. As authors of this article, we were involved in the project in various ways including teaching, research, mentoring and curricula development.

Methodology

Participants

The students that were interviewed were identified by the college staff and authors as being proactive, agentic, and unique in their activities on campus (two of the authors teach at the colleges; hence, had first-hand acquaintance with students there). To follow the call of the Special Issue, we deliberately aimed our inquiry to explore students' agency in the specific educational context. The respondents from the Palestinian Arab college were involved in the activities of the International Office; they had participated in exchange programmes with institutions abroad and hosted delegations from international organisations. The respondents from the mixed college studied on (and graduated) from its M.Ed. programme, which, through the TEMPUS project, implemented an internationalised curriculum. ~~The M.Ed. included a course dealing with multiculturalism, internationalisation, and globalisation; visits to Jewish and Palestinian Arab schools; online collaboration with students from institutions abroad; online sessions with international lecturers; social activities aimed at knowing different cultures; and study trips to other countries to learn about their educational systems.~~

The first, second, and third authors conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the selected students from October 2017 to December 2017. Six students (five females and one male¹) were interviewed through Skype and in person. Participants are introduced in Table 1.

Table 1: Study Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	General Description
Esti (Student at the mixed college)	Female	A Jewish special education teacher and an instructor at the Ministry of Education. Esti specialises in implementing technology to assist disabled children. She currently works with blind and visually impaired children. She participated in the study trip to a European University organised by the college for internationalisation purposes.
Shirley (Student at the mixed college)	Female	Shirley is a Jewish teacher. She is very active in the social life of her community. She works as a special education teacher with visually impaired children. She participated in the study trip to a European University organised by the college for internationalisation purposes.
Fatima (Student at the mixed college)	Female	Fatima is a Bedouin special education teacher and the director of the Centre for Special Education. She was actively involved in the activities aimed at internationalisation and initiated social events during her study. She also implemented the ideas of internationalisation in her working group at the Centre.
Sofi (Student at the mixed college)	Female	Sofi is a Jewish elementary school teacher and the deputy principal of a school in the south of Israel. She initiated an international project in which her students interact with students in North America. She participated in the college's study trip to a European University.
Jamilla (Student at the	Female	Jamilla is a Palestinian Arab Muslim pre-service teacher, a third-year student of early childhood education. She is an active participant in internationalisation activities at the college, having

¹ This ratio broadly reflects the actual gender distribution at teacher-training institutions.

Palestinian Arab college)		participated in an exchange group in Austria. She recently received a prestigious scholarship from the U.S. Embassy to study for one semester at an American university.
Mahmud (Student at the Palestinian Arab college)	Male	Mahmud is a Palestinian Arab Muslim pre-service teacher enrolled in his fourth year of Arabic and Islamic studies who was actively involved in internationalisation activities with Muslim participants from a Muslim country.

In the recruitment phase, each interviewee was contacted by email and asked to participate. All those approached agreed, and the interviews were scheduled by Skype or in person. The interviews lasted between 60 to 120 minutes. Some participants were interviewed twice to refine points that arose during the interviews or afterwards. Interview questions focused on participants' descriptions and perceptions of internationalisation, their experiences in international education, and the extent to which they perceive internationalisation as important to students and to their campus. Participants were asked to reflect on their own experiences as students and ~~how they perceive these experiences to relate to~~ the relevance of internationalisation in their lives following graduation. With the interviewees' informed consent all interviews were audiotaped using a digital voice recorder and transcribed. Esti, Shirley and Fatima were interviewed in Hebrew, Sofi and Jamilla in English, and Mahmud in Arabic. All transcripts were translated to English for analysis. Data analysis took place following each interview, and additions and additional questions were added between interview rounds based on the responses. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committees of both institutions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the four stages that Marshall and Rossman (2014) suggested.² This analysis identifies themes in the data by searching for recurrent experiences, feelings, and attitudes, so as to codify, reduce, and connect different categories into central themes. The coding was guided by the principles of comparative analysis, including the comparison

²Namely, "organising the data," "generating categories, themes, and patterns," "testing any emergent hypotheses," and "searching for alternative explanations."

of any coded element in terms of emergent categories and sub-categories leading to the identification of patterns. In analysing the interviews, we looked specifically for convergence and differences across participants' reports (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The emerging issues were then assembled as several major themes regarding the participants' motivation and views. Verbatim quotes are used throughout the findings section in order to provide a more accurate account and representation of students' own perceptions and voice. The quotes were translated to English (when necessary) and back to Hebrew/Arabic to ensure that the intended and accurate meaning was maintained in the translation process. Thus, we aim to maintain the students' authentic voices throughout the article to the best of our ability, mindful of the potential danger of speaking for others or asserting our own opinions and perceptions over those expressed directly by the students. The constitution of the research team aided access and the critical engagement with the data, we would suggest. The authors are a Palestinian-Arab scholar and a Jewish scholar, working at the colleges, a Jewish scholar working at a research intensive institution in Israel, thus possessing knowledge about the higher education system in Israel, but being an outsider for the research setting and an EU scholar, who had a leading role in the EU project. The last two authors thus served as critical outsiders throughout the data analysis process, suggesting alternative explanations to the data and facilitating a process of sharpening the final interpretations presented here. The trustworthiness of findings derived from multiple iterations between the authors, repeated readings of theory and interview transcripts, and continuous dialogue between the authors, the data and the literature.— As suggested by Bourke (2014), during the stages of data collection and analysis we constantly addressed our own positionalities in the field, reflexively engaging with the data and each other, acting in a constant “self-scrutiny, and self-conscious awareness of the relationship between the researcher and an ‘other’” (p. 2). Our relationship with each other, developed through our engagement in the TEMPUS project, is robust.— We are each positioned differently in the context with one of us being a total outsider.— We argue that the robustness of our relationship supported us to challenge each other when necessary, in particular when one or other of us considered that another might be engaging in stereotypical interpretations of data. ~~Before we move into the findings section, it is important to outline the study's limitations.~~

The main limitations are a small sample and the process of selection of the participants. The participants from both colleges were identified as proactive in internationalisation by the authors who teach in these colleges and were open to being interviewed regarding issues

related to internationalisation and identity. ~~The participants from the Palestinian Arab sector noted that they did not think most students from their sector would agree to participate and assisted us in locating more interviewees who were open to having this discussion. This means that although our participants displayed a wide array of opinions and perceptions, they cannot be said to be representative of their populations and nor do we seek to claim this, given the qualitative nature of the study. Nevertheless, focusing on the unique phenomenon, in this case, students who exercised agency in internationalisation, provides us with valuable knowledge on this process and the role of students within it.~~ Students are frequently pictured as passive recipients of internationalisation (Waters and Brooks, 2010) but, in this case, despite its small size, the group is presenting an agentic outlier to the common discourse in the literature. In our purposeful sample, the students perceive their role as- not limited to their role as learners, but rather permeating their professional life. We hope that future research in the area will benefit from our findings, in particular in studies of students' agencies in other non-western societies as well as in research into the effects of students' agency on the implementation and policymaking of this process at organisational and national levels.

Findings

Professional, social, and political dimensions emerged from the interviews as playing a major role both in students' agency in the process of internationalisation and, more broadly, in the application of internationalisation within a conflict-ridden society. We describe below each of the dimensions, providing a glimpse into complex, multidimensional perceptions of internationalisation processes through the eyes of the students and graduates.

Professional dimensions: Implementing internationalisation and multicultural activities in their studies and professional lives

All respondents rationalised their proactivity in internationalisation processes mainly through a professional lens, stressing the importance of being involved in the global community, being updated regarding educational systems in other countries, sharing professional knowledge, and life-long learning in order to secure their professional prosperity. Since all of them were teachers or training to be teachers, the students envisioned internationalisation as an essential dimension of their learning, which could and should be intrinsic to their classrooms. Esti stated that "the more communication takes place, the more we use technology, the more we will succeed in crossing national borders; knowledge

developed in one place will move to another. We need to spread and receive knowledge, not to remain in a bubble.”

This quote addresses internationalisation from a pragmatic perspective, stressing the capabilities needed and the means to achieve these, by participation in internationalisation processes. Such words resonate with the ‘capabilities approach’ of global citizenship (Dill, 2013), which may be fostered through internationalisation. Interviewees claimed that student and staff exchanges, as well as online and face-to-face conversations with international colleagues can promote internationalisation in higher education and also transform the political situation in Israel. In Jamilla’s words, “exchanges, conversing, and talking to others [lead to] accepting diversity.” Here, Jamilla focuses on the possible contribution of internationalisation beyond practical means, as a way to “accept diversity”, implying that pragmatic and ideological motivations to internationalisation may intervene.

Foreign language skills were mentioned specifically as a necessary condition for communication and desired skills that students aimed to acquire through their proactiveness. “We live in a global world. It is important to know more about education in other countries, to learn more strategies and more skills, for example, languages,” Fatima explained. She noted, “I’m very successful in my career but because I’m not good at English, I feel I miss a lot. [Mastery of a] language allows us to understand a culture and read articles.” Lack of fluency in English had hindered Jamilla’s also noted that English competency had hindered her earlier experiences with internationalisation tremendously. She told us that her first application to the student exchange programme was rejected, with a recommendation to improve her spoken English and essay-writing skills. After additional language training, she was accepted on the programme. Later, her ability to converse in English qualified her for a management position in the college’s Social Involvement Unit and a scholarship through a prestigious programme sponsored by the U.S. Embassy to study for one semester in the US. She stated:

My participation in the exchange programme prepared me for the scholarship. Professionally, it opened many doors for me. Currently, I even consider the possibility of teaching in another country. I urge all students and friends to participate in international activities at the college and to actively travel and learn in order to become a better teacher.

In this example, Jamilla ~~demonstrates moved from the professional personal~~ advantages of internationalisation ~~for her personally, to her experience as teacher later in her career (and the possible advantages of internationalisation to for her own students)~~, as a ~~means to reason for~~ agentic investment in internationalisation.

It is important to highlight here the double disadvantage that Palestinian-Arab students face in their professional lives. With Arabic as their mother tongue, living in a country with Hebrew as a dominant language, these students are encountering even more challenging situations when engaging with other countries, usually using English (their third language). We can see that ~~pursuing~~ professional success ~~pursued by these students from the Palestinian Arab community~~ is more challenging for ~~them these Palestinian Arab students~~ than for their Jewish peers, echoing the exclusive nature of internationalisation (Guo & Guo, 2017). All respondents related to their responsibility as teachers to educate their pupils to live in a global world, which ~~goes beyond extends~~ their own experiences in internationalisation as higher education students. They mentioned various skills their pupils needed: willingness to learn and change, language skills, open-mindedness, communication, socialisation, technological literacy, openness to cultural differences, respect for others, and appreciation of universal humanistic values. In Esti's words,

It is essential to develop language skills—reading, and writing—since children will need to communicate with people from other countries. Children have to know how to use technology such as special keyboards, mobile equipment, software ... They need socialisation skills to integrate into work teams ... We have to keep universal values, no matter which religion we belong to.

The interviewees shared their proactive experiences relating to the internationalisation process; these included communication with delegations from abroad, study trips to other countries, and implementing internationalisation in their teaching and professional practices. Sofi, Esti and Shirley participated voluntarily in visits to universities in European countries organised by their college, aimed at familiarising students with those countries' educational systems. Jamilla also participated in the exchange programme with a European university. They saw their visits as a meaningful turning point in the perception of internationalisation. Shirley commented: "visiting a European University (name of the country omitted to maintain anonymity) contributed to me a lot. Even in occasional conversations, I tell about

their educational system, especially about teacher education. It made me think about my work and what I'd like to adopt from there and what not."

Jamilla became more active in workshops sponsored by the International Relations Office (IRO) at her college, in which she presented newly learned techniques, methods, and class structures. She noted: "We have exchange students visiting our college, and we meet foreign groups from embassies and other institutions. We, the students, arrange and manage orientations of incoming groups, and show them around. Through internationalisation, we can promote multiculturalism." During her study trip, she encountered some international students at the European university she visited. Some were Arabs but were afraid or ashamed to speak their language; she helped them use the language through songs and music. Jamilla reflected on her experiences:

Being exposed to internationalisation and multiculturalism allowed us to focus on issues other than disciplinary teaching. We learned the value of collaboration, the importance of teaching skills of coping with difficulties, and how to teach our pupils how to make connections. [These are] things we don't teach in our schools.

Shirley likewise integrated intercultural dimensions into her own teaching, in leading a project whereby her school children participate in an inter-school activity communicating online with children from different schools in Israel. Also Sofi, after graduation, initiated an international project whereby her ~~school~~ pupils communicate and work collaboratively on robotics with children in North America ~~on robotics~~. Throughout the interview, Sofi stressed how much her teaching approach had become more collaborative and inclusive, following her exposure to principles of internationalisation and of internationalisation of the curriculum during her MEd.

Social dimensions

The social dimensions that emerged from the interviews concerned issues of gender, equality, social constraints, and the role of religion in students' roles in the internationalisation processes. Palestinian Arab society in Israel is mostly traditional and patriarchal; it is often described as a society in transition (Abbas & Mesch, 2015). As such, it is neither fully traditional nor fully liberal. The family still plays a major role in setting guidelines for women's behaviour, dictating what is allowed and what is forbidden, especially when women participate in activities from which they were traditionally excluded (Abu Rabia Quader & Oplatka, 2008). Such attitudes towards women may present specific challenges to students'

involvement in internationalisation. Indeed, Jamilla had the consent of her mother but not her father to attend the Masters' programme, and she tried very hard to convince her father "that also women can do it."

Family resistance to female students' study trips abroad, in particular, was an obstacle that Palestinian Arab interviewees had to overcome. Bedouin women are more confined in their mobility, although according to our data some progress has been made in this regard; as Jamilla put it, "women are not free to move around at night without their husband or brother. Travelling abroad alone was a taboo and impossible, although some trends of freedom are starting to emerge recently and women can travel to study or stay away overnight to study." Notably, even the male Palestinian Arab Muslim interviewee, Mahmud, who himself participated in an educational visit abroad, expressed concerns about allowing women to travel alone, citing a saying of the Prophet and verses from the Qur'an. Moreover, according to him, ~~even~~ one of the female lecturers at the Arab college ~~requested to include~~ also asked that her husband be included ~~in on an overseas~~ trip ~~overseas~~ on religious grounds. As researchers, we held different views on these responses and discussed them at some length. What was important to us, however, was that the participants' original voices and perspectives were foregrounded.

Another theme regarding social challenges concerned the lack of sensitivity to national identity and religious traditions of Jews and Palestinian Arabs. In Israel, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, it is customary for people to stand for a moment ~~s of~~ s of silence to honour the victims when a siren is sounded nation-wide. At the mixed college, this day marks tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish students because Bedouins do not tend to participate, and prefer to leave the class during the siren call. Some Jews accept this practice and others consider it disrespectful. Esti stated:

I remember Holocaust Remembrance Day, when some Bedouin students exited a classroom when the siren was sounded. Then somebody [a Jewish teacher, whose relatives were Holocaust victims] reprimanded one of the students. She [the Bedouin student] was very hurt. All Jewish students supported her. But later we [the Jewish students] discussed this case, and some students said that Bedouins have to stand up and give respect to the Holocaust. I disagreed—they do not have to give respect. It's not theirs—they gave respect by exiting the classroom. They did not whistle, did not sneer. In their prayers, they do not require me to kneel. It was wrong to require from

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3 them to stand still. It was right to discuss [this incident], since it allowed us to learn
4 how to act and respond in such situations.
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6 Religious issues, moreover, were mentioned as substantially impacting attainment of
7 the goals of internationalisation and thus were challenging to the students, somehow limiting
8 their capability for agency. Esti related a story told by her son, reflecting that religious
9 traditions of different cultures were not respected equally in one higher education institution
10 because of the pressure of extremely religious Jewish students:
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13 Last year on the holiday of Hannukah, near the *menorah* [the traditional
14 candlesticks], the student association put a Christmas tree ... Then religious students
15 asked to remove the tree, arguing that it does not belong to the Jewish tradition. My
16 son was surprised and objected since he believes in respecting all cultures. Religious
17 students were angry about that. I was proud of my boy for fighting for this. But
18 ultimately the tree was removed. A religious majority won.
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25 Esti shared another example of a lack of sensitivity among some Jewish students towards
26 Muslim religious traditions: “During Ramadan, the local cafeteria decided to close the part
27 where hot food was served. Some Jewish students [outside Esti's study group] were angry
28 about that; they even complained on the college Facebook ... But it is a part of coexistence.”
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31 The commonly cited definition of internationalisation (Knight, 2004) addresses global,
32 international and intercultural dimensions of the process. Here, we show how students’
33 agency reflected upon the intercultural dimension, expressing their wishes and worries within
34 their agentic role in the process. We wrote earlier (Authors, 2015) how in conflicted societies,
35 internationalisation is largely perceived as an engagement between the groups in conflict,
36 groups who are not necessarily ~~of foreign origin~~ from different countries. In other words, here
37 as well in Israel, students many times often refer to the “Other” as a member of the conflicting
38 groups Jewish/Palestinian-Arab. Participating in and even leading internationalisation
39 activities was described by students as a means to foster intercultural understanding with the
40 internal “Other” (Authors, 2016).
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49 The interviewees from the mixed college noted a cultural gap between Jews and
50 Palestinian Arabs. Fatima, the Bedouin teacher, shared the following anecdote:
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52 One of the activities [in the international module] was devoted to becoming familiar
53 with the cultures in our group. For example, Mina [pseudonym], a Jewish student,
54 shared that when her daughter saw the Bedouin teacher (a member of the group) in
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3 traditional dress in a picture on the computer screen she panicked. [The traditional
4 Arabic dress] was threatening in her imagination. We laughed, but then we
5 recognised that it's not funny. It is also possible that if a Bedouin child sees a
6 religious Jew, then perhaps s/he too would be frightened. And those are people who
7 live next to each other, a few metres away. This shed light for us on how important
8 is it to talk to each other and to know each other. If we don't, we all lose.
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13 In her opinion, intercultural activities aimed at promoting relationships between different
14 groups within Israeli society on a personal and systemic level should be implemented in
15 schools and be an integral part of internationalisation processes; moreover Fatima's agency
16 did not ~~stop at the college end with graduation but, but rather was transferred~~ continued into
17 her professional role as a school teacher. Issues of social importance such as gender, cultural
18 sensitivity and intercultural interactions were discussed by our participants as direct
19 occurrences of and in internationalisation.
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24 *Political dimensions and the Arab-Israeli conflict*

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27 The last dimension that emerged from the interviews was the complex political
28 situation in Israel; namely, political tension stemming from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict
29 and its role in the agency expressed by the students in the internationalisation processes. On
30 the most basic level, interviewees noted discrimination in state budgets and inadequate
31 resources in Palestinian Arab Israeli communities as impeding internationalisation prospects
32 for students from this sector. Students addressed this profound inequality in a much wider
33 sense, not necessarily restricting it to their role in higher education. Fatima stressed that
34 Bedouin secondary schools have very limited resources and children have less opportunity to
35 learn and be prepared for advanced studies, which can diminish their chances of being
36 involved in internationalisation.
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44 Beyond discrimination in funding, however, Palestinian-Arab interviewees considered
45 the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to be a major challenge to internationalisation in Israeli higher
46 education. While respondents from the mixed college viewed political aspects of
47 internationalisation as connected to the conflict and complicating the issues of co-existence,
48 students at the Palestinian Arab college perceived internationalisation as an opportunity to be
49 ambassadors for their community and Islam, especially in the face of rising Islamophobia in
50 the West. Jamilla noted: "the Arab-Jewish conflict makes things extreme; during the visits
51 abroad, the word 'conflict' was mentioned a lot. Our job is to present our culture and religion
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and explain ourselves to others. The conflict was positive in the sense that it allowed us to explain it and engage with others." As Mahmud put it,

we need to explain ourselves to others; ... thus, internationalisation at our college is satisfactory in my view and it ought to continue ... Furthermore, internationalisation at Arab college carries a specific importance, and it is different than in other colleges in Israel due to religious, political, and cultural restraints and limitations.

Both Bedouin and Jewish respondents from the mixed college perceived the conflict as challenging the intercultural relations between people in Israel.

Our interviews revealed that the period of escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the war between Israel and Hamas in 2014 was equally traumatic for Jewish and Bedouin interviewees at the mixed college, as they live in the region that was under rocket attacks. Fatima recalled:

We all—Bedouins and Jews—live in the same region that was under rocket attacks by Hamas. We were all equally fearful and we constantly shared our feelings... During the rocket attacks from Gaza, my daughter panicked. Every time we heard a boom, she hid under a desk. Last year we went to Antalya to rest, and at the hotel, music that sounded like the bomb-warning siren was playing at the pool. She ran out of the pool, terrified. Other children felt no fear. So, nobody wants a war.

The war challenged the relationships in the mixed college's study group, but through open communication, the students managed to maintain their relationships by condemning any kind of violence and expressing empathy to each other. Fatima emphasised the importance of good personal relations for improving understanding and diminishing mutual fears, even during critical events such as a war:

Even during the Arab-Israeli conflict's escalation, we [the study group at the mixed college] were empathetic each to other. We all condemned the killing of innocent people. During the summer semester of 2014, classes on campus were cancelled and we had to study online due to the war. We all supported each other. We are all responsible adults. We conversed frequently using WhatsApp and supported each other academically and emotionally. We felt belongingness and cohesion within the group.

All respondents expressed their desire to live in peace with mutual respect between people belonging to different nationalities and cultures. Shirley suggested that to accomplish

such coexistence, “we have to know other’s cultures.” Esti blamed religious extremism as the main cause of wars and conflicts:

I think you can hate a person but not a nation or community. Most wars and conflicts in the world happen because of religious extremism. They think, ‘If you believe in something different than what I believe, I’ll hate you.’ We have to keep universal values no matter which religion we belong to.

Here again, students adopt the notion of ‘global citizenship’ (Green & Mertova, 2016) as a desired outcome of internationalisation. Pursuing universal values thus help to shape inter group relations in Israel. In Fatima's opinion, Palestinians and Jews should recognise each other and return to the peace process:

Today we, Palestinians and Jews alike, know that there are two nations here, and no one will leave here. This is the best place to live—we’ll go neither to Syria nor to Jordan ... I think it is important to recognise the other side in her/his right to be here in peace. I think we have already started the peace process and it's a pity that it's frozen. People understand that the life is short, everyone wants to live. It’s not worth fighting. Better to live in peace, to be secure. It's important to sit around a table: one gives up on something, the other gives up on something and peace will come. If both sides recognise each other, they will both win.

Discussion and conclusion

~~The aim of this study was to examine students’ agency in shaping institutional internationalisation processes, in particular during their studies but also, as was revealed through the interviews, in their own teaching careers upon graduation.~~ In our interviews, three major dimensions that shaped how students ~~encountered difficulties to express~~ agency in internationalisation processes emerged: professional, social, and political. These dimensions were detailed in the findings section, revealing the specific domains where internationalisation was engaged with, and also students’ agency that was transferred from their colleges to their professional worlds.

~~In this exploratory study, students enacted internationalisation for pragmatic and ideological reasons. We also found that internationalisation in a conflict ridden society influences individuals’ careers and societies, but perhaps can also be employed politically. Institutions’ internationalisation policies are often motivated by economic gain, status, and self promotion. For students, however, internationalisation may overcome the gulf between~~

~~their own culture and in-group and the other side of the conflict, thereby serving the purpose of promoting mutual understanding.~~ This Special Issue is aimed at drawing on new ways of thinking about students' engagement, which positions the students as agentic contributors to university life. By focusing on marginalised populations situated in conflict ridden societies we reveal some of the dimensions that play a critical role in the students' agency and their unique considerations, rationales and actions. In addition, we were surprised by the extent that students' agency was not limited to their activities in their institutions, but rather followed them in their professional lives. It might be that the teaching profession provides them with unique opportunities to exploit their knowledge and skills by preparing the future generation of students. This notion should be further explored by administrators of teacher education programmes as a potential field of action.

Theoretically, internationalisation is assumed to lead to an understanding of the 'other' alongside developing a sense of empathy on the one hand and agency to change the existing situation on the other (Authors, 2017; Green & Mertova, 2016). Thus, promoting integration of the international, global, and intercultural dimensions into the aims, activities, and delivery of education to promote intercultural competence/cosmopolitanism or global citizenship, might contribute to conflict resolution, given the skills and attitudes that students acquire through the process. We claim that global citizenship, although the term was not used directly by the students, is indeed a suitable analytical construct, for the understanding of these students' agency. In our case, students expressed non-compliance with the social and political constraints of their lives, and thus were urged to act. Our participants, who were not familiar with internationalisation prior to the TEMPUS project, became proactive in promoting internationalisation in order to achieve professional advantage (as per pragmatic meanings of global citizenship) and they seek peace and mutual understanding (as per the ideological meaning of this construct) (Authors, 2017a; Leask, 2008).

Our conclusions thus anchor students' agency in the institutional and national contexts. We claim that proactiveness is being exercised when some pragmatic value is being offered to the students and this value is clear and tangible (students mention English language, computer skills, working with the 'other' etc). Moreover, students in our study showed some incompletion with many of the dominant social norms in their institutions and home environments, but this incompletion was possible, due to the 'high gain' that students had from expressing their agency. In addition, students' agency was not universal and neutral, but rather context specific, anchored to the intercultural relations between the minority and

majority in Israel and to the conflict at large. Thus, to promote students' ~~ageneies~~agency, institutions must not only provide opportunities and training (where appropriate), but more importantly deliberately show the students the value that can be gained from such engagements.

In terms of practical recommendations, we suggest that when developing and implementing internationalisation strategies, institutional stakeholders must pay particular attention to students' potential agency and thus develop various support mechanisms to promote such agency. Moreover, specific attention should be paid to the various differences in the local student population, in particular where these differences lead to tension, as in Israeli higher education.

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